Writing Mechanics: Common issues

Use a comma

* between elements in a series of three or more items

(ex: apples, orange, and grapes)

* to separate two independent clauses joined by a conjunction

(ex: The children read their books, and they wrote poems and stories.)

Do not use a comma

* to join two independent clauses

Incorrect: We went to the store, we bought eggs.

Correct: We went to the store, and we bought eggs.

We went to the store; we bought eggs.

* between two parts of a compound predicate

Correct: The children read their books and wrote in their journals.

Incorrect: Then children read their books, and wrote in their journals.

Use a semicolon

* separate two independent clauses that are not joined by a conjunction

(ex: The children in the first grade read folktales; the children in second grade read myths and legends.)

Pronoun agreement:

* pronoun must agree in number with the noun it replaces

Correct: I want to help children achieve their dreams.

Incorrect: I want to help each child achieve their dreams.

Apostrophe:

* Do use to show possession: the teacher’s desk; the teachers’ lounge
* Do not use for plurals unless showing possession (or before gerund):

(Correct: The girls went to the store. Incorrect: The girl’s went to the store.)

Common spelling issues:

a lot – two words; incorrect: alot

separate – incorrect: seperate

definite – incorrect: definate, defiant

it’s/its – use “it’s” for “it is”; use “its” for possessive as in “The puppy chased its tail.”

there, their, they’re; to, too, two

*References:*

Strunk, W., Jr. & White, E.B. (2000). *The elements of style* (4th ed.). New York: Longman.

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Publication Manual of the American Psychological* Association (6th ed.).

Washington DC: APA.